

FM REVIEW COMMENTS 2013 15

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This is a well-written essay that skillfully balances the personal travails of the doctor with her professional responsibilities. It tells a moving story with lyricism and keen observation. I think it could be improved on slightly, and have made recommendations to that effect.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: This is a beautifully written submission. It tells a moving story that well highlights the tensions between the personal and professional lives of doctors. The language is poetic and lyrical, and the fruit metaphors that pervade the essay show how we attempt to reframe the unimaginable in more familiar and lovelier ways. The balancing of the mother's story and that of the patient shows impressive craft. On a personal note, I am delighted the surgeon emerged smiling, and hope it means a good outcome for your mother.

Addressing a few small issues would improve the essay for our readers. As reviewer 1 suggests, you might clarify your level of experience as a physician. If you are indeed a resident, perhaps you could clarify that point. For example, in the paragraph that starts "I had a new patient in the ICU that morning" you could add "Now, as a 3rd year resident [or whatever], I could see that this patient was sick."

I also agree with reviewer 2's suggestion that you could elaborate a bit in the paragraph starting "I wanted to sit still." Where did you want to be? What made you continue your rounds? As well with your lovely but unelaborated statement about "putting the pieces back together" - maybe you can say a few words about how you try to do that. Finally, in the paragraph beginning "My patient's family was sitting..." perhaps you could add a few lines about what you would have wanted to do or say when you "looked at them," possibly tying it in with the idea of "putting the pieces back together." What would have "staying a doctor" meant to you at that moment? Why would that have been easier than what you had to face?

More substantively, although I personally appreciate the abrupt and slightly ambiguous ending (is the surgeon smiling at his own skill or because he is the bearer of good news?), the essay might benefit from a short paragraph making explicit what this event, juxtaposed as it was with your own patient care demands, meant to you in terms of your education as a physician. This might be a place to allude to your resident status (if indeed this is the case) and reflect on the implications of this experience for your own approach to doctoring - did this help you become a better doctor in any way?

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: This essay tells a poignant story about what it is like to be simultaneously a physician taking care of patients and a frightened daughter of a seriously ill mother. It juxtaposes these two perspectives gracefully and perceptively, while illuminating the struggle these different roles can present. It is an exceptionally self-aware and emotionally vulnerable piece of writing. The author has carefully considered suggestions of reviewers and has worked with them in most cases. For example, she has elaborated on her seeing the family of her patient in the waiting room as she was leaving to

go to her mother's bedside, and the conflicting emotions she experienced in this situation. In the instance where she chose not to follow my suggestion regarding the ending, on rereading the conclusion I trust her judgment. I recommend acceptance.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for this beautifully written, poignant, and self-aware essay. The elaborations you added provide rich detail into your own emotional experience and your struggle as both doctor and daughter. Given these additions, I respect your decision to leave the ending as originally written, understanding it as a reflection of the ambiguity of doctoring - and of life.